



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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BRUSH DRAWING.

BY MRS. H. PERRIN

I.

I HAVE been asked to add a few remarks on the subject of "Brushwork," which was so ably begun by Mrs. Steintal in the May No. of the Review.

No one who like myself has had the privilege of listening to Mr. E. Cooke's lectures on Child Nature with regard to Art, and has watched his able fingers depict the curves he so dearly loves, can fail to be impressed by the way in which he deals with the subject. Taking his hints from the baby's spontaneous scribble, he builds up a systematic and progressive training directly in accordance with natural tendencies, in a way to stimulate the inventive faculty so strong in a child. He advocates taking it straight to natural forms for its examples, that the eye may quickly become accustomed to drawing from the round instead of from the dull, lifeless copies so much used by the Science and Art Department.

First we must create an interest and love in the subject, and afterwards exercises for training accuracy of eye and dexterity of hand will be much more quickly accomplished.

To teach a child to educate himself should be the aim of all teachers; and though this principle has permeated the whole Kinder Garten system, it has not been till lately carried out in its fulness with regard to art training.

Drawing is a means of expression as well as an art, and so it should be connected with the whole employment of the child, and it should not be an isolated performance.

Mr. Cooke recognizes the delight the child has in portraying the animals and plants around him, and he shows us that the

business of the teacher is to take the cue from these hieroglyphs and to transform the same into a truer portrait by means of the simplest and fewest lines possible.

In my own nursery we have a large black board hung where the little ones can reach it, and they are encouraged to draw with white chalk large designs, or representations of animals and plants *from memory*, and any friends who come in are invited to do the same. In this way we get a variety in design, etc., and the best drawings are honoured by being allowed to remain on the board for a day or two. It is easy to fix a little shelf to catch the chalk dust; in our case we have placed the board over the ottoman sofa upon which the children stand in order that the board can be higher from the floor and not so liable to get rubbed.

In *very few* cases should copies from the flat be allowed, indeed I would almost say never, as they warp the natural powers in a child and cramp his imagination. Let a child's mind and hand be as free as the wind, merely guide it in the right channels and teach it nothing that it has afterwards to unlearn, or which stunts its development. "Steam and electricity are our servants, because we learned from them their nature, entered into it, and worked in sympathy with it—did not oppose it. The nature of the child can no more be altered by us. We must study, sympathize and conquer by obeying it."

This month I would urge bold blackboard drawing with white chalk, the arm working freely from the shoulder in elliptical curves, horizontal and vertical lines, and next month I hope to give a few hints on colour and colour washes without the use of either chalk or pencil; the great benefit of "Brushwork" being that it can be made quite a moral training in exactness and decision. The children should be carefully taught to make all their mistakes in the air, and not touch the paper or blackboard until the hand is ready to draw fearlessly and with precision the line required. No retouching can be allowed. The old habit of indecision with cramped muscular handling of the pencil, followed by indiarubber was ruinous to all proper development and fostered stammering if not in word, in thought and hand.

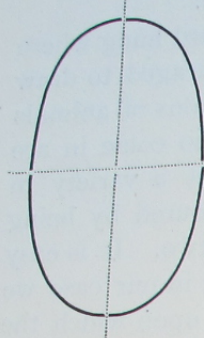
Mr. Cooke is the first of our great teachers to recognize that the child's first lines are elliptical curves, and to show how the *oval*, rather than the *circle*, is to be traced in all

animals and plants and things in motion. Ruskin dwells on the beauty of the ellipse and its four quarters when divided by a horizontal and vertical line. For this reason and also because something like the letter "j" Mr. Cooke calls each quarter a "j" curve, and shows how many of the most beautiful designs are based on this element. "The Greek potter has the child's conception, and delights in that general form we find common to living things. Vase and human form have ever been associated. We shall find no other art so

familiar with the oval, its varieties, and elements; it is the germ-form of Greek art, the source of its simple strong curvature and ever beautiful ornament."

This month I would suggest that our little ones be asked to make different patterns, using only this one "j" curve in varied combinations. Let the patterns be put between parallel lines so as to make a frame in which to put their picture; the latter to be any shells, animals, etc., they can think of showing the ovate form or any flowers, plants, etc. A good exercise would be to draw, on a large scale, a fountain with the water rising and falling in "j" curves from an elliptical basin. These exercises can be done either on the blackboard or on large sheets of paper, in the latter case no pencil is to be used, but the brush, well filled with colour—say light red—should be held *vertically* with the wrist of the right hand resting on that of the left, in order to gain both freedom and steadiness. The point of the brush only must touch the paper, and the pressure to be such as to produce a fine regular line.

Next month we shall see how in colour blobs of the brush, when placed sideways on the paper, the same oval form appears, and how it permeates all the vegetable world.



SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS IN ITS RELATION TO CHARACTER.

THIS is a self-conscious age. In all walks of life; in politics, in literature, even in philanthropy, the age is subjective. Education in its various branches tends to the development of individualism, and the tendency of individualism is to be conscious of self. This is, however, to a great extent the inevitable attribute of an active condition. It is very beautiful to see an entire absence of self-consciousness as is usually the case in little children, when not spoilt by over-indulgence, or worse by over-severity, but when the child is a little older, and awakes to its relations with things outside itself and immediate surroundings, the self-conscious age is reached, and is shown usually by sudden shyness and apparent stupidity, or by the rooted conviction in the child that he knows better and more on every possible subject than his elders. Trying though this last phase certainly is, there is still so much in it of promise, so much evidence of existing character, that friends and relations may well wait with patience, and hope for self-consciousness to give place to self-possession—that true possession of the soul, which Matthew Arnold saw regretfully was so often missed in the hurry and bustle of life—

"We see all sights from pole to pole
And glance, and nod, and bustle by
And never once possess our soul
Before we die."

The absence of self-consciousness, so beautiful wherever met with, is then we see usually characteristic of childhood,*

*An instance of painfully precocious self-consciousness in childhood may be found in the "Life of the late Lord Lytton," who, when very young, startled his mother by enquiring if she were conscious of her own identity!